

Next-gen formats suffer delays

The past couple of months have been characterised by broken promises. Sony has had to delay the launch of its new games console. Meanwhile in the HD camp, Toshiba and partners said that HD DVD PC drives, home players and media would arrive in March. At the time of writing none of these were any closer.

However, there was some good news. Founding member of the Blu-ray Disc Association, as March began Philips made a major announcement which could help decide the continuing contest for the next-generation higher density optical storage market in the consumer sector. It said it would launch its first Blu-ray Disc consumer products over the coming year.

This promise includes the full spectrum: a home entertainment player, the BDP 9000, an all-in-one PC Writer (Triple Writer) and new Blu-ray media (BD-R and B-RE, single layer 25 GB and dual layer BD-R and BD-RE 50 GB). Philips said that it will all happen in the second half of 2006 which is probably a more sensible approach and one that could pay off.

Philips says its new Blu-ray solutions offer enough storage for nine hours of HD movies, 23 hours of standard definition content or 72 CDs on a single disc. Along with the partners in the Blu-ray Disc consortium, they are convinced that it has the support and technological innovation behind it to be the industry leader and is supported by more than 160 of the world's largest gaming manufacturers, movie studios, consumer electronics and PC manufacturers.



Philips' TripleWriter (SPD7000) features recording and playback capabilities of several storage formats: CD, DVD and Blu-ray Disc (not HD of course).

Sony recently was said to have postponed plans for the introduction of its Blu-ray based Playstation 3. However, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment and Lions Gate, have just set the official date for the first release of a motion picture on the new Blu-ray disk (BD); May 23. The date will see the release of 13 titles, along with the launch of the BD player, by Samsung.

Philips' TripleWriter (SPD7000) features recording and playback capabilities of several storage formats: CD, DVD and Blu-ray Disc (not HD). Also, Philips has no less than four types of discs pending - BD-R and BD-RE, single layer 25 GB and dual layer BD-R and BD-RE 50 GB. The TripleWriter can be built into any PC featuring S-ATA interface, it says.

Consumers and to a lesser extent professionals are very interested in format compatibility. Never mind the relative storage specification, say some industry observers, people want to be able to play different discs on the one machine. A lower profile contest between the next-gen HiFi sound formats, DVD-Audio and SACD, may provide

clues. Very few DVD players support these formats so neither has enjoyed big market success. Recent dual-format-controller ICs from Atmel, Broadcom et al., could indicate that dual-purpose HD-BRD players could come, some suggest. However, it is not as straightforward as the time when drives came out which support CD and DVD media in your PC.

Basic combo drives included a 780 nm IR laser for CDs plus a red, 650 nm laser for DVD wavelengths plus they had optics to focus at the 1.2-mm-CD and 0.6-mm-DVD levels. BRD/HD DVD brings in a 405 nm, blue-violet-laser. Toshiba cites its advantage that HD DVD has its disc structure in common with red DVD so single-lens optical head can be used for both. Adding Blu-ray thoroughly complicates the optics thanks to the need for focussing at the 0.1-mm level. All this and you still have to factor in the 'write' laser and so on. A technical challenge indeed if you consider that market success is conditional on the kind of steep pricing curve precedent of DVD players and recorders over the past year.

OLED deal

Mitsui Chemicals Inc and Idemitsu Kosan Co Ltd (Idemitsu) have reached the agreement to establish a business alliance in R&D and manufacturing of OLED materials.

Coherent exits HeNe

Coherent Inc is to stop marketing Melles Griot helium-neon (HeNe) lasers under its name, effective April 3, following an 8-year distribution agreement. "We've been happy to private label these products; however, we've decided to focus on non-HeNe products such as our direct diode, diode-pumped solid-state and optically pumped semiconductor products," it said. "These products, offering wavelengths from the UV, visible to near-IR, continue to offer compelling solutions for our customers."

Melles Griot will honour current contracts and support for new and existing HeNe lasers, Coherent said. The last HeNe shipments from Coherent were expected to be made on March 31. Coherent said it will work with its current customers to facilitate the transition.

For more details, visit: www.coherent.com

InGaAs spectrometer

Edmund Optics has announced a new f/3.0 NIR spectrometer with excellent sensitivity in the 900- to 1700-nm range. It is powered by a large 512-element linear InGaAs array that is both thermoelectrically cooled and isolated via a built-in heat sink.

For more details, Visit: www.edmundoptics.com

All optical access

Alloptic Inc announced that Zibo CATV Network has successfully deployed the Alloptic passive optical access equipment in new multi-dwelling units (MDU) in Shandong China.

For more details, visit: www.alloptic.com